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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000375

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: 549/ISLAMIC COALITION CANDIDATE PREDICTS "HARD COMPETITION"  
WITH UIA/555 IN KARBALA

REF: HILLAH 0364, HILLAH 0354

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,  
AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The number two candidate in Karbala on the Islamic Coalition list (ballot number 549), Ibrahim Ali Abbas Al-Mutayri, predicted that the electoral contest for Karbala's six seats in the new National Assembly would feature "hard competition" between the Islamic Coalition and the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA, ballot number 555). He asserted that the fight for seats between the two Shi'a lists in Karbala was essentially for swing voters, explaining that each list has its faithful followers, so it is the votes of "those in between" that each list has been courting in the run up to the December 15 election.

¶2. (SBU) Al-Mutayri (also known as Hajj Al-Ibrahim), a current member of the Transitional National Assembly from the UIA, met with the South Central Regional Coordinator and REO Hillah staff on December 8. The Islamic Coalition is a collection of approximately a half dozen Shi'a Islamist political parties, most or all of whom were part of UIA in the January election. Al-Mutayri is the Secretary General of his party, the Islamic Labor Organization, which has the Karbala-based cleric Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Taqi Al-Modarassi as its spiritual leader. The 549 is running lists in eleven provinces, including Karbala.

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MUTAYRI SEES 555 AS MAIN RIVAL; SEEKS NON-INTERFERENCE FROM HAWZA

¶3. (SBU) When asked for a prediction on the contest for Karbala's six seats, Al-Mutayri would not give numbers, but stated that there are many lists and that there will be "hard competition" between 549 and 555. He described the other lists as "weaker." Regarding the constituency of the 549 in comparison to that of the 555, Al-Mutayri maintained that his coalition had its followers, the UIA had its own followers, and "so we fight over those in between," which is to say, the undecided voter. Al-Mutayri disclosed that the Islamic Coalition would be willing to work with other coalition lists after the election if it was beneficial to his group.

¶4. (C) The Regional Coordinator asked Al-Mutayri about his understanding of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani's December 3 statement, in which Sistani expressed support for the major Islamic coalitions, which many Shi'a took as an endorsement of the UIA (NOTE: This interview took place prior to Sistani's December 11 statement, in which he appeared to back away from the position he took on December 3. Reflets. END NOTE.) Al-Mutayri responded that all the Hawzas urge the people to vote. Presumably in reference to Sistani and his senior clerics, Al-Mutayri avowed that all Iraqis would get their rights if the Hawza did not interfere, and "so we ask our brothers in Najaf not to interfere." He noted that there was no Sistani fatwa supporting the UIA.

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CANDIDATE EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER IECHI'S IMPARTIALITY

¶5. (C) Al-Mutayri told REO staff that his coalition feared widespread cheating by IECHI staff (Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq). He declared that the polling centers are not independent but are run by the political parties. Al-Mutayri complained about his group's posters being torn down by competing parties (NOTE: This is a very common complaint among parties in the South Central region. END NOTE). He also complained that "those in power" -- a likely reference to SCIRI (Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq), the Badr Organization and followers of Moqtada Al-Sadr -- had taken over Iraqi security services to serve their own ends.

¶6. (U) Al-Mutayri said voters view the lack of public services, including electricity and water, and the reconstruction of streets and other items, as key problems. He described the lack of aerial spraying for a date palm parasite as another problem currently facing Iraqis, one that could be addressed with "just

two planes."

17. (C) At one point in the discussion, Al-Mutayri urged REO staff not to mistake the Wahhabi or "terrorist way" for genuine Islam. Of the terrorists, he said, "they make a dirty image for Islam."

18. (C) COMMENT: In the devoutly Shi'a holy city of Karbala, the Islamic Coalition list is the main competitor to the United Iraqi Alliance, which is described by both its supporters and detractors as the strongest coalition in Karbala and the South Central region in general. The 549 list will likely capture at least one of Karbala's six seats, with the UIA winning as many as three. Allegations of electoral fraud are typically made by secular parties. Al-Mutayri's expression of concern indicates that it is not just secular competitors to the UIA that fear its pervasive influence in South Central Iraq. END COMMENT.

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